

# Men's Health

## Ernest Hemingway: Adventures and Disasters

### Hemingway's Greatest Hits

-- and near misses

By Peter Moore

#### **Dodging Smallpox**

While working as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star* in 1917 and '18, [Hemingway](#) hones his spare writing style while covering marginal characters for the paper. He saves one of his subjects -- a smallpox-stricken homeless man -- by dragging him to the [hospital](#) when no one else will. He later charges the expenses for this rescue mission to the *Star*. The deadly pox doesn't take hold.

#### **Surviving a Shelling**

[Hemingway](#) is wounded in a mortar attack as he distributes chocolate and cigarettes to Italian soldiers in the trenches during World War I. He becomes soaked with blood as he carries a soldier to the [first-aid station](#). In a letter home, he writes that they pulled 227 shrapnel fragments out of his leg and that he'll never again "look well in kilts."

#### **Weird Hemingway Moment #23**

For the first 3 years of his life, [Hemingway's](#) parents clothed him in pretty dresses and hair ribbons. The " 'fraid o' nothin' " kid worried that Santa might think he was a girl and bring the wrong presents. One of his biographers, James Mellow, lets him off easy: "Hemingway seems not to have suffered any dire psychological effect from the early cross-dressing."

#### **Machine-Gunning Mako Sharks**

During a 1931 fishing trip on his boat, the *Pilar*, [Hemingway](#) uses a Thompson submachine gun to fend off sharks intent on scavenging his catch -- a 500-pound [tuna](#) -- before he can hoist it onto the boat. He ends up shooting himself in both legs trying to sink a man-size mako.

#### **Slugging Orson Welles**

At a 1937 screening of the film *Spanish Earth*, for which [Hemingway](#) cowrote the narration, he comes to blows with the narrator, Orson Welles, because Welles wants to change some of the lines. After throwing chairs and punches in front of the crowd, the two reconcile over a bottle of whiskey.

#### **Weird Hemingway Moment #57**

Roald Dahl, kid-lit author, visited [Hemingway](#) in London during World War II. When Dahl entered his hotel room, he found Hemingway applying hair-growth elixir. The following conversation ensued:

DAHL: "Why the eyedropper, Ernest?"

HEMINGWAY: "To get the stuff through the hair and onto the scalp."

DAHL: "But you don't have much hair to get through."

HEMINGWAY: "I have enough."

### **Spying on Fascists**

Hemingway establishes the "crook factory" in Key West, a clandestine outfit whose mission is to spy on pro-Franco and pro-Hitler agents in Cuba. The operation, which at one point consists of six full-time operatives and 20 other agents, is disbanded by the FBI less than a year after it is formed.

### **Chasing Nazi U-boats**

After outfitting the *Pilar* with extra fuel tanks, grenades, and high-caliber machine guns, Hemingway and a few buddies set out to hunt Nazi U-boats in the Caribbean. It's mostly an excuse to drink to excess and employ large munitions, but that's why it's great to be Ernest Hemingway.

### **Weird Hemingway Moment #82**

Traveling in Africa in the 1950s, Hemingway took a Masai bride while his fourth wife, Mary, was off shopping in Nairobi. A few days after Mary's return, he wrote in her diary, by way of making up: "[Mary] loves me to be her girl, which I love to be. . . . I loved feeling the embrace of Mary which came to me as something quite new and outside of tribal law." To which you can only respond, "Whoa, T.M.I."

### **Mixing Martinis under Fire**

Hemingway is driving with a few buddies on a road near Luxembourg in 1944 when he hears the ripping sound of aircraft fire. He yells, "Jump!" and his friends fly out of the car just as it's strafed down the middle by a machine gun. While they huddle in a ditch, Hemingway uncorks his canteen to distribute premixed martinis.

### **Walking Away from Plane Wrecks**

Touring Uganda by plane in 1954, Hemingway crash-lands when his pilot nips a telegraph wire. Twenty-four hours later, his rescue plane also crashes. Hemingway's legend grows, but the man himself doesn't fare so well. A ruptured kidney, crushed vertebrae, brain damage, and chronic pain haunt him until his suicide in 1961.

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